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ABSTRACT

The document is intended to serve as resource information for school secretaries who interact with emotionally handicapped (EH) students. An initial section describes typical characteristics of EH students and lists examples of such negative behaviors as noncompliance, physical and verbal aggression, attention-seeking, and inadequate social skills. The role of support personnel in relating to the EH student is discussed, emphasizing the importance of effective communication. Self-evaluation tools include a criteria scale for building self-esteem in students and a communication habits checklist. Among 13 tips for secretaries are recommendations for establishing procedures with the principal for interacting with EH students, modifying questions or answers to meet student needs, and maintaining confidentiality. A final list of 10 suggestions for handling surface behavior includes planned ignoring, fairness, avoiding negative statements of control, and being specific, consistent, and simple with rules. (JW)

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SECRETARY'S RESOURCE GUIDE FOR SUPPORTING PROGRAMS FOR EMOTIONALLY HANDICAPPED STUDENTS

Division of Special Education
Indiana Department of Education

Indiana Committee on the Emotionally Handicapped
Shirley J. Amond, Chairperson

June 1987

EC 212260

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INDIANA COMMITTEE ON THE EMOTIONALLY HANDICAPPED

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Secretary's Resource Guide

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Under the leadership of the Indiana State Advisory Council on the Education of Handicapped Children and Youth, the Indiana Committee on the Emotionally Handicapped has continued its efforts to resolve those issues which inhibit the development of programs for seriously emotionally handicapped students.

This publication is the result of the cooperative efforts of many individuals. Those individuals have contributed time and shared their expertise toward the completion of this activity.

To all those who served on the committee, a special note of thanks is expressed. The sharing of information and personal skills in the research, writing, and editing of this publication is deeply appreciated.

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When people think about special education and handicapped students, they often think about those students whose disabilities are visible. However, students with emotional handicaps (EH) have problems that are not often visible.

The students with emotional handicaps come to our attention because they demonstrate behaviors that are excessive and significantly different from their peers. While each student has different strengths and weaknesses, there are some characteristics they all share.

One characteristic an EH student exhibits is an inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. The inability to learn is not because they are mentally handicapped or have other disabilities, such as deafness, blindness, or physical handicaps. Emotionally handicapped students generally have average to above average intelligence, but are not achieving academically to their potential in the classroom. They may be below grade level in academic skills, have short attention spans, be unable to concentrate, have a poor memory, be careless and disorganized, and seek excessive amounts of attention.

Another characteristic of the EH student is the inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. The student may not be able to develop close friendships or have the ability to work and play cooperatively with others. They lack the ability to demonstrate sharing and making appropriate choices for social interaction. Examples of this behavior are students feeling persecuted and threatened by others. They may also repeatedly annoy others while feeling no remorse or guilt. Difficulties with authority (you are an authority figure) is also frequently noted. They resist rules, resent advice or constructive criticism, insist on having their own way, and are unwilling to compromise.

A third characteristic of the EH student is inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances. These feelings may be exhibited as obsessive-compulsive behavior such as constantly erasing or recopying work. They cannot accept change of activities or persistent repetition of activities or acts. These students may engage in magical thinking, excessive fantasizing or delusions about their abilities and may misinterpret situations. Sexual behavior may be inappropriate. Preoccupation with sex, exhibitionism, and public masturbation have been noted. Students may exhibit temper tantrums, explosive uncontrolled anger, and may be easily provoked. Students may harm others physically and destroy property without thinking about the consequences.

A fourth characteristic may be a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression. Students who are depressed may exhibit a loss of interest in usual past-times, loss of appetite, low energy level, fatigue, insomnia, social withdrawal, and/or suicidal tendencies. They may be physically abusive. Students may refuse to take a bath or complete everyday self-care activities.

The fifth characteristic of the EH student is a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. These fears may be exhibited as nightmares, refusal to go to bed, unrealistic fear of possible harm, physical symptoms or complaints (headaches, stomachaches). They may also worry excessively about future events, lack self-confidence, become excessively dependent on adults, and become easily frustrated when they fail at a task.

The preceding characteristics describe a wide range of behaviors which may be seen in a student with emotional handicaps. Emotionally handicapped students will not have all of the characteristics discussed, but typically may demonstrate several types of the behavioral difficulties. Examples of behaviors of emotionally handicapped students follow.

GENERAL NONCOMPLIANCE
- Being late
- Will not follow directions
- Will not remain in assigned seat

PHYSICAL AGGRESSION
- Kicking
- Hitting
- Biting
- Spitting
- Throwing objects
- Destruction of property
- Self-abusive behavior

VERBAL AGGRESSION
- Swearing
- Verbal threats
- Name calling
- Teasing

ATTENTION SEEKING BEHAVIORS
- Excessive talking
- Obscene gestures
- Making faces
- Annoying noises
- Removing clothing

POOR SELF-CONCEPT
- Mood swings
- Under/over estimation of self-importance

INADEQUATE SOCIAL SKILLS
- Manipulation
- Hostility
- Relationships with others

The emotionally handicapped student may participate in special classes from one hour per week to as much as all day every day of the week. The decision on the type of classroom assignment is made at a school conference. The conference is called a Case Conference, and members of the Case Conference Committee include: student's parent or guardian, school administrator, and the special education teacher. The Case Conference Committee may also include bus drivers, teacher aides, the student and other support staff.

At the conference the students academic, emotional and behavioral functioning will be discussed. A plan will be developed at the conference which outlines the activities in which the student may participate. The behavior management plan is discussed and outlined. This plan is referred to as the Individualized Educational Program (IEP).

The student and parents have a legal right to limit information being provided to people outside the school community. The confidentiality policy of the individual school corporation determines which personnel have access to a student's educational records. Support staff must not discuss student behaviors, problems, or records with others. Support staff may be asked or required to keep records on student behavior. Written reports must be:

1) Be written legibly
2) Be written in detail
3) Note the date and time of incident
4) Include statements of facts about the incident and the student's behavior or condition.

The EH classroom is designed to increase the student's academic and behavioral skills. This includes teaching the student to solve problems, how to improve their self-concept and how to relate appropriately to adults and peers. Support personnel such as bus drivers, secretaries, cafeteria workers, and custodians do provide services to the student. Other support personnel may include professionals from the Welfare Department, the Juvenile Courts and Community Mental Health Centers. These support personnel are a very important part of the student's total program.

The student interacts with many people during the day. Each of you have an opportunity to impact on the student outside of the classroom. Learning how to communicate effectively and manage student behavior is a very important part of your contact with the student. Building self-esteem in students is a very important factor in communications with the student. Page 4 is a self-esteem criteria scale for you to complete. The self-esteem criteria scale provides an opportunity to see how you can build student's self-esteem.

Support staff must communicate with parents and school personnel, help collect data and be professional in carrying out their roles. Support staff provide positive reinforcement for behavior management. Specific responsibilities for the support staff will be dependent upon their job description and their level of involvement with the student. Positive communications with the parents are also very important.

A Criteria Scale for Building Self-Esteem in Students

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1. I learn students' names at the beginning of school and call them by name often.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am courteous with the students.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I find time to speak to students individually and alone.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I find out what students value as important and use that as a springboard for discussions with them.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I put forth a concerted effort to spend time with all students.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I look for students who appear in need of "special" attention.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I let students know I miss them when they are not in school.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I share my feelings with students.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I encourage students to have new positive experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I encourage students to do their "personal bests" and discourage unnecessary competition.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I do not allow a student's mistakes to be considered a "personal failure."	1	2	3	4	5
12. I am enthusiastic with students.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I avoid showing favoritism.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I let students know exactly what is expected of them in the office.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I encourage all students to ask questions.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I am always prepared and on time.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I allow students to make some mistakes without criticism.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I give positive comments of encouragement about good behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I make a special effort to praise students when appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I put forth a special effort to help "slow" students.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I create situations in which needy students can experience "success."	1	2	3	4	5
22. I create an environment that demonstrates a concern for individual growth and development.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I listen attentively to all students.					
24. I never ridicule or embarrass students.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I look for positive attributes in students and comment on them specifically.	1	2	3	4	5

Total
(The sum of all numbers circled) ☐

The lower the score, the better the secretary is in building self-esteem. The lowest possible score is 25. A score greater than 25 indicates areas for improving. A very high score would indicate severe problems in your ability to build up or see the good in others.

25 35 45 55 65 75 85 95 105 115 125

Positive Behavior Encouraged

Negative Behavior Encouraged

As a secretary, your position enables you to interact with school personnel, the student, and parents. Effective interpersonal skills between and among the school and home community is crucial in establishing and maintaining a positive relationship.

Communication is a two way process of giving and receiving information. Interpretation is an important part of communication. Past experiences influence the listener's evaluation and meaning of the message. Verbal and nonverbal cues play an important part in communication. Facial expressions, body posture, and eye contact and movements communicate attitudes. Just as talking is a form of communication, so is silence.

When receiving information, make appropriate responses. Effective listening contributes to a better understanding of the speaker's viewpoint and increases the chances of avoiding or managing misunderstanding and conflict.

It is important that you listen and talk with others, ask questions and share concerns in a manner that is honest, positive, and constructive.

The following questionnaire should assist you in assessing your own communication habits. A good communicator would rate items 1 through 5 as "almost never" and items 6 through 10 as "almost always."

Mark each statement with one of the following: Almost always, Usually, Sometimes, Seldom or Almost never.

Good Communication Habits Checklist

When I talk to someone . . .

1) I get the feeling they don't understand me. _____
2) I express opinions as facts. _____
3) I'm afraid to reveal my feelings. _____
4) I use negative statements in problem situations. _____
5) I forget to watch for feedback from the other person. _____
6) I use examples to get my message across. _____
7) I use details to get my message across. _____
8) I use a different tone of voice to help me say what I mean. _____
9) I chose the right moment to raise an important issue. _____
10) I am conscious of my body language. _____

When I listen to someone . . .

1) I listen only for facts. _____
2) I fake attentiveness. _____
3) I get distracted easily. _____
4) I daydream. _____
5) I interrupt. _____
6) I ask questions if I'm not sure of the message. _____
7) I paraphrase complex messages. _____
8) I listen "between the lines" for the meaning. _____
9) I watch the speaker's body language. _____
10) I use body language to signal that I'm listening. _____

Page 6 is a tipsheet which will provide you with some reminders about dealing with emotionally handicapped students. Pages 7 and 8 are suggestions for handling behaviors that were developed by Nick Seta, juvenile probation officer in Cincinnati.

TIP SHEET
FOR SECRETARIES

1. Establish a good rapport with the student, parent, and staff.

2. Children learn by watching others. Modeling is a way of learning through observation and imitation. If you remain calm in a crisis, speak with a firm but pleasant voice and display a calm and quiet manner, you will serve as a model for students.

3. Clearly communicate with students in a positive manner. Remember you are not a counselor so do not try to counsel the students regarding their behaviors or problems.

4. Praise students for appropriate behavior and accomplishments.

5. Modify questions or answers to meet the needs of the student.

6. Communications with classroom teachers and parents will help you understand the children and prepare you to meet their needs. Review behavior management techniques.

7. Establish with the building principal the procedure to be used in the office for interacting with emotionally handicapped students. This course of action should be well defined and address such issues as, what to do when the child is left in the office, what to do when no certified personnel are present, what to do if the child runs away from the office, how to respond to an emergency intercom call, etc.

8. Anticipate situations and solutions should a crisis occur.

9. If you are designated by the principal to give medications, follow local policy and state codes.

10. Confidentiality - Records, documentation and verbal reports and information must respect the confidential nature of the student's needs and education.

11. Become familiar with the forms used in the special education program. Review the IEP forms, permission forms, and others that are normally found in the special education student's file.

12. Keeping of appropriate and accurate records under the direction of the special teacher and the principal should follow school policy, state and federal guidelines.

13. Trust the judgment of professionals working in your building. They have the expertise to work with children, "not everything is as it looks." <u>Don't make value judgments</u>. Ask !!

SUGGESTIONS FOR HANDLING SURFACE BEHAVIOR

THEY DO WORK!

1. KNOW YOUR PURPOSE, RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY . . .

   PURPOSE -- To direct and redirect the behavior of youngsters in a manner effective and comfortable to us as managers and healthy and productive for the children in our care.

   RIGHT -- This implies the very sensitive and personal right of guiding and controlling the behavior of other human beings - The "Right of Management."

   RESPONSIBILITY -- In exercising our Right of Management we must also accept the Responsibilities that are attached to that Right, namely: Reciprocal Dignity and Role Modeling.

2. HAVE A PHILOSOPHY . . .

   You are people who are involved in and influence the lives of others. As such people you must have a strong, personal philosophy about what you are doing. It must be a philosophy of which you are completely convinced . . . Our field is rampant with theories of how you should teach a kid, discipline a kid, motivate a kid, etc. If you are not strong in your own thoughts and feelings, you will end up following, floundering and frustrated; wondering why "people don't make up their minds," when you should be making up yours.

3. SOMETIMES IT'S BETTER NOT TO SEE OR HEAR . . .

   Planned ignoring is the ability to select which behavior to intervene with and which to ignore. You cannot interfere with all of your children's behavior and be effective. This technique permits the dissipation of tensions allowing youngsters to stop their own behavior (strolling, touching).

4. USE A SIGN, SOUND OR LOOK . . .

   In many instances a word or motion provides enough intervening support to enable youngsters to handle their impulses. Actions such as yelling, cursing, moving, etc., can be stopped by a simple sign, sound or look . . . So often we raise the roof when we only need to raise our eyebrows.

5. BE FAIR . . .

   If you do not witness an incident, handle all parties alike, ignore or give equal treatment.

   (BEWARE OF YOUR BIASES.)

6. BECOME ONE OF THEIR FANS . . .

Build your kids up by showing interest in their work, projects, play, etc. . . . Exude praise and amazement over their accomplishments . . . Show excitement with them about their successes . . . They love phrases such as, "Did you do that by yourself?", "Is this really yours?", "When did you get that good?"

7. BE SPECIFIC, CONSISTENT, SIMPLE IN YOUR RULES . . . (SIMPLE, DIRECT AND CORRECT)

This is especially true with young children. Tell them what you want. Keep procedures simple and avoid vague rules. Complexity lends itself to confusion and leaves children with only one option - TO ACT OUT. Once your requests are known, maintain consistency . . . An organized house routine not only tells kids what is expected of them, but what they can expect in return. ISN'T THIS WHAT WE ALL WANT IN OUR JOBS?

8. SAVE YOUR THREATS . . .

We usually regret making them. We make them when we are angry. We say we're going to do things we cannot do, should not do or do not even want to do. More importantly threats move us from a position of power to one of no choice. We put the trigger into the hands of the youngsters.

9. USE THE POSITIVE RATHER THAN THE NEGATIVE . . .

Too often we violate this rule by ignoring youngsters until they misbehave, thus focusing their attention on incorrect behavior . . . Too often we use negative statements of control . . . We'll say "Take your feet off the chair," when we should say "Put your feet on the floor." Or we say "Stop leaving your coat on the chairs," instead of "Hang up your coat." Negative statements do not tell a youngster what to do. This sets us up for MALICIOUS OBEDIENCE!

10. BECOME AN ARTIST . . .

Managing and coordinating human behavior is pure art . . . Molding, guiding, and controlling human behavior is the most demanding of all the arts . . . Artists cause CHANGE and leave an IMPRINT. . . The three qualities essential to artistry are:

A) COMMITMENT	B) DEVELOPMENT/PROGRESS	C) ENDURANCE
1) Statement of Goal	1) Continuous Growth	1) Immortality
2) Self-Assessment	2) Ongoing Self-Assessment	2) Excellence

Source: Nick Seta, Juvenile Probation Officer, Cincinnati, Ohio

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